



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Second Sunday of Easter A Divine Mercy Sunday



The Incredulity of Thomas: Rembrandt, 1634

1764: purchased by [Catherine II of Russia](#) (1729-1796), [Saint Petersburg](#), from Johann Ernst Gotzkowsky (1710-1775) By 1930: [Pushkin Museum, Moscow](#)



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

*God of mercy,
You wash away our sins in water,
You give us new birth in the Spirit,
And redeem us in the blood of Christ.
As we celebrate Christ's resurrection
Increase our awareness of these blessings,
And renew your gift of life within us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God forever and ever.*

[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer 452]

Catholic
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& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

Divine Mercy Sunday

Pope John Paul appointed the Second Sunday of Easter *Divine Mercy Sunday*. The feast commemorates Jesus' revelations to St. Faustina who was canonized on April 30, 2000. God's mercy is especially highlighted in the readings for this day. The Gospel particularly highlights the mercy of God as it serves as basis and foundation of the sacrament of reconciliation—one of the ongoing sacramental expressions and experiences of God's mercy in our day. The feast is a meditation on God's compassion, mercy and benevolence—a reflection so important in light of the trials and tribulations the world is suffering and will suffer in the future.

The entire Easter season is a remembrance made present of Christ's Paschal Mystery—the life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of Christ's Spirit to the world. An entire season is set aside for this reflection.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Acts 2:42-47

- ▶ The Acts of the Apostles is a catechism on what it means to become God's people, the church.
- ▶ The Acts of the Apostles functions like an ancient cultic biography in which the actions and stories of a group's founders were told and retold by the devotees of the group so members could follow the example set forth by the leader of the group.
- ▶ Such biographical works were intended to posit the vision and mission of the group's leader or master.
- ▶ Today's pericope (segment of reading) functions like the summary of a cultic biography.
- ▶ This summary described life in their post resurrection community.
- ▶ The community shared worship, teaching and all goods in common.
- ▶ The community experienced signs and wonders associated with the eschatological reign of God and that were promised by Christ.
- ▶ Today's pericope highlights the unity of the community.
- ▶ The Christian community was living in the power of the risen Christ. Christ's saving event freed them from sin and at Pentecost they received the gift and power of the Spirit. The fruits of those gifts are evident in the love, sharing and unity of the community.
- ▶ Converts to Christianity were borne out of attraction to the Christian community's

- ▶ self-sacrificing, paschal and loving way of life.
- ▶ Evidence of the unity they fostered can be found in the way they shared everything in common.
- ▶ Acts certainly sets forth an ideal to be emulated, but like us, they no doubt experienced varying degrees of success when it came to the practice of those ideals.
- ▶ One need only consider Paul's letter to the Corinthians to understand that unity and equality were not always achieved.
- ▶ Acts invites every Christian to strive for the ideal and live a life of self-sacrificing love.
- ▶ The role of the church is promote the reign of God here and now as we wait for the reign of God for all eternity.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ How might today's reading be lived out in your world today?
- ▶ In what way, if any, have you experienced unity in the Christian community?
- ▶ In what way, if any, is your community living the ideals set forth in the Acts of the Apostles?
- ▶ What obstacles to unity have you discerned?
- ▶ What might you do to be an agent of unity in your community?

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9

- ▶ Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises God made to the people of Israel.
- ▶ Today's reading from Peter expresses the hope of every Christian.
- ▶ Christians are to find the deepest meaning for their lives in the cross and resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ Jesus suffered a martyr's death not simply to end suffering, but to share his life with every human being.
- ▶ Death was understood as the ultimate end—hopeless end.
- ▶ Jesus died to offer us hope in the face of the hopelessness of death.
- ▶ Eternal life has been promised. God keeps his promises.
- ▶ It is for this reason that there is no earthly suffering that can bring us to despair because we know what awaits us.
- ▶ Suffering refines the sufferer—it makes him or her purified like gold is purified by fire.
- ▶ Peter reminds Christians that those with faith in the risen Christ will be saved.
- ▶ Believers can be confident that God will keep his promise and everlasting life will

be rewarded.

- ▶ Eternal reward begins here and now—the now and not yet of eternal salvation.
- ▶ “Salvation of souls” in verse nine is a reference to persons. It is not a reference to the immortality of the soul.
- ▶ Life is a series of ups and downs—of dying and risings. We can participate in those ups and downs and join them to the cross of Christ or we can go solo and suffer alone.
- ▶ Our life in Christ and our ministry for the sake of the Gospel will be as effective as our willingness to embrace the Paschal Mystery in our lives—that is—our willingness to welcome the cross in our lives with the assurance that resurrection follows the cross.
- ▶ There are two levels of such suffering—personal suffering and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus’ primary perspective is suffering for the sake of the Gospel, but suffering offered for the sake of others can also be redemptive.
- ▶ Few of us are asked to suffer for the sake of the Gospel, there is no one threatening us with death for our faith. Most of us have, however, experienced ridicule and misunderstanding.
- ▶ Most of us have experienced some form of personal trauma, pain and hardship. The challenge of the Gospel is to diligently offer it up—to join the pain in our lives to the suffering Christ—and in so doing participate in the ongoing redemption of the world.
- ▶ God walks with us in this suffering and invites our complete and total reliance on him.
- ▶ God invites us to look beyond the present moment to things yet unseen—to trust that suffering is transitory and that we can either grow through it or be buried by it.
- ▶ A wise pastor once said, “Suffering can either make us bitter or it can make us better.”
- ▶ In the Lord’s Prayer we pray that we are not put to the test. We are to diligently pray that the suffering in our lives not propel us to lose our mooring.
- ▶ We are to pray for the grace to abandon ourselves into God’s providential care.
- ▶ Hope is the greatest of gifts.
- ▶ Easter faith is a remembrance of things yet unseen, and dreams continually hoped for. Hopefully, a lifetime of faithfulness in the midst of life’s challenges will strengthen us to remain steadfast when real persecution comes.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ One thing seems certain about the Christian life. Christians can count on

experiencing trials and tribulations. We will especially experience it for our efforts to live the Gospel of Christ. There is a reason we are exhorted to “take up our cross and follow Jesus.” What does this reading have to say to us about this truth and how does it relate to your life at this time in your life?

- ▶ In what way is this reading a comforting or consoling word?
- ▶ What is the Good News when it comes to suffering and the sufferer?
- ▶ In what way, if any can you relate to what Peter is saying here?
- ▶ What does hope mean to you?
- ▶ Describe your Easter faith.

Gospel: John 20, 19-31

- ▶ Today’s Gospel is a story that is told in all three cycles—thus we hear it on this day every year.
- ▶ Jesus appears before the Apostles and offers his healing peace, reconciliation, faith and forgiveness.
- ▶ Jesus appears as his transformed, glorified self; time, matter and place no longer restrain him. He appears to the Twelve. He shows them his hands and his feet—they know him as their Lord and Master.
- ▶ The Incarnation of Christ continues beyond death.
- ▶ Jesus extends *shalom*—the peace of Eden. That one word is so laden with eschatological [last days/end times] overtones that it requires we spend time unpacking the fullness of meaning.
- ▶ God created the heavens and the earth (remember, Christ was present at that creation event).
- ▶ God created all things; God created human beings.
- ▶ God placed human beings in the garden. God entered into covenant with them, promising to care for them. They in turn would reciprocate by loving God with heart, mind and soul and love one another as much as self. They would also be good stewards of the created order—they would care for all living things. They would especially care for God’s anawim—the poor, marginalized and oppressed peoples who could not care for themselves.
- ▶ According to this reciprocal covenant between God and human beings all creation would live in perfect harmony in the garden. All creation would enjoy the shalom/peace of Eden—God’s original intention for the world.
- ▶ Messianic prophecy affirmed that the hoped for Messiah would usher in the kingdom of God. The hallmark of that kingdom would be the restoration of the peace of Eden.
- ▶ Jesus stands in the midst of his Apostles and ultimately says, “Peace.” In other words, I have come to restore the peace of Eden—the harmony promised at creation of the world. The covenant is fulfilled in Christ.
- ▶ One might say, “What a preposterous claim: We still have wars, he did not bring an end to division and violence—how can he make such a claim?” Indeed Jesus can make such a claim. Whenever two or more are gathered in his name and living the Gospel he came to preach then human beings are living the harmony

intended for all creation—they love God, one another and in response they care for all of God’s creation—the poor, the lowly, and the created universe.

- ▶ Jesus offers his peace and forgiveness. He commissions them and sends them out to forgive others.
- ▶ Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to strengthen the community to live the peace and forgiveness he offered and commissioned them to offer to others.
- ▶ Later centuries relied on this text as basis for the sacrament of reconciliation.
- ▶ Jesus materializes a week later. This time Thomas is present. Thomas doubted that Jesus had been there—he needed proof. Jesus shows him the marks of his torture and death. Thomas professes him as the risen Lord.
- ▶ The evangelist John’s intention came full circle in this Gospel. Jesus is the divine Son who pre-existed—who was present at the creation of the world—the Word made Flesh, who was tortured, died, and rose again for the salvation of the world.
- ▶ The appearances of Jesus after his resurrection were intended to strengthen the fledgling church in the face of Jesus’ absence. All was not lost! Jesus mission continues until the end of the age!
- ▶ It continues in us. We must persevere to the end.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See the appendix for an example.

- ▶ In what way have you experienced the promised peace of Eden in your life? In other words, in what way, if any, have you experienced the harmony promised in the messianic kingdom of God?
- ▶ How have you experienced the promised reconciliation between peoples?
- ▶ What would be your response to those who say they have never experienced it?
- ▶ Have you ever doubted that Jesus is who Christians claim him to be?
- ▶ Do you think doubt is a sin? If so, why? If not, why not?
- ▶ What does Jesus think of your doubt?
- ▶ What is the Good news in this reading?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about doubt?
- ▶ What are the implications for Christian discipleship?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

Many years ago I began ministry in a new parish. I experienced a very difficult transition. One of the groups with which I worked struggled with my arrival and was not very welcoming. One person boasted that he was going to remain in the group just to make life miserable for me. He preferred the way things were and was not happy about the change and decided he would take it out on me. Needless to say, my association with this group was trying. I knew I could do nothing on my own to change hearts. I decided that it was not my job anyway—it was God's. Thus, I simply began to pray with and for the group. We prayed for needs; we prayed for healing; we prayed that God would be with us to guide and lead us.

Slowly, the *shalom* of Eden—the peace promised by Christ—emerged in the group. The group bonded and became aware of the needs of one another. Prayer became a primary focus and reaching out to brothers and sisters in the group formed the group as a tight knit community. Indeed the fact that we gathered in Christ's name and experienced the presence of God—discord, division and animosity melted away.

If the world could learn from Jesus' example, there would be no room for war and hatred. He held in his hands the answer to peace for the whole world and the world has simply remained deaf and blind to his solution.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Faith
Church and Ecclesiology
Church Structure
Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory
Salvation/Soteriology
Baptism
Confirmation

Symbols of Bread and Wine
Jesus Christ
Sacraments
Evangelization
Creed
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

FAITH

Thomas briefly lost faith in Christ. He is an icon for the Christian journey of faith. Thomas struggled with his faith in Christ, but he worked through it and consequently embraced a deeper, intimate, committed faith. 1 Peter is a catechism on what it means to have faith—we share abiding trust that God will not disappoint and that he will bring his plan of salvation to completion in us. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what we believe about FAITH.

CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY

The author of Acts used the literary tool of summary to chart the development of the emerging church—the fledgling communities. The church exists to establish the reign of God now as Christians await the coming of Christ in the age to come. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

The author of Acts used the literary tool of summary to chart the development of the emerging church—the fledgling communities. The church exists to establish the reign of God now as Christians await the coming of Christ in the age to come. The church was unified in heart and purpose. They share all things in common. They upheld the ideal Church as they worked to achieve that end. Ministry was needed in the community and a clear definition of roles. Those roles continue today. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH STRUCTURE.

ESCHATOLOGY, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY

1 Peter expresses the reality that Christ did not just suffer death on the cross to ease human suffering, but he opened the gates of heaven and made it possible for us to share eternal life with him. The entire Easter season is a reflection and manifestation of the salvation that is ours. The Easter event reminds us that as a result of Jesus' sacrificial death, we are heirs to eternal life with Christ in heaven. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about ESCHATOLOGY, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

God's plan of salvation has come to fruition with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He rose to eternal life, thus opening the gates of heaven for all of us. Salvation has been accomplished through the definitive death and resurrection of Christ. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

BAPTISM

At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgy itself makes the sacraments of initiation an important focus for our doctrinal session. Thus today we will focus on the SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgy itself makes the sacraments of initiation an important focus for our doctrinal sessions. The sacrament of confirmation anoints the person with God's Spirit and conforms their life intimately to Christ's life—thus strengthening them to fully participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ that was manifested par excellence at the Easter Vigil. Through this sacrament we are given the strength to profess faith in Christ. During the weeks of Easter we have a front row seat watching the early Church go out and spread the Christian faith when we hear the Acts of the Apostles proclaimed each week. Thus today it is fitting that we focus our attention on the SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgy itself makes the sacraments of initiation an important focus for our doctrinal sessions. The sacrament of Eucharist fully incorporates the neophyte into the Eucharistic community. When we eat the Bread of Life and drink his Blood we share fully in his Paschal Mystery. The sacraments of initiation incorporate the neophyte into the Paschal Mystery of Christ—his life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Spirit that was manifested par excellence in the Easter Vigil liturgy. Thus today it is fitting that we focus our attention on the sacramental SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE.

JESUS CHRIST

Today's Gospel reflects the ultimate saving act of Jesus' ministry—his resurrection from the dead. Peter professes faith in the Christ event to Cornelius and Paul reminds us that we all *die and rise* with Christ. It is thus most fitting that on this Easter Sunday we focus our attention on Jesus Christ and what we believe about him. Today is an appropriate time to focus our attention on JESUS CHRIST.

SACRAMENTS

Sacraments continue Christ's saving mission in our day and our time. We are given access to his ministry through the sacraments. The Church teaches that the sacraments of the Church manifest Christ's own Paschal Mystery—his passion, death and resurrection. We remember what Christ did and in the process the Paschal Mystery is made present to us. We are given access to his healing, reconciling and salvific mission through the sacraments. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about sacraments—the celebrations/rituals that bring the healing, reconciling, saving mission of Christ into our midst—that make present Christ's life, passion, death, resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Thus today our doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about SACRAMENTS.

CREED

Thomas briefly lost faith in Christ. He is an icon for the Christian journey of faith. Thomas struggled with his faith in Christ, but he worked through it and consequently embraced a deeper, intimate, committed faith. 1 Peter is a catechism on what it means to have faith—we share abiding trust that God will not disappoint and that he will bring his plan of salvation to completion in us. If Thomas doubted, it is very easy for all of us to similarly experience doubt. It is thus important that we reflect on just exactly what we do believe as Christians. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what we believe about CREED.

EVANGELIZATION

Peter professes faith in Jesus. He tells Cornelius the awe-filled events he just witnessed. We too are called to witness to Christ and the salvation he freely won through the sacrifice of his life. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on our Easter faith and what Jesus commanded us to do--we are to go out and preach the Good News to all the nations. Today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.